

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 CCO-00 SS-15 SSO-00 ISO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 /047 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/INS:JNACH:JES

APPROVED BY NEA:SSOBER

NEA/INS:DKUX

NEA/PAB:RPECK

S/S:JMEALUM

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O 140213Z FEB 75 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 034231

TOSEC 252

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, PAK

SUBJECT: KASHMIR--SHEIKH ABDULLAH RETURN TO POWER LIKELY

PASS ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON

1. EMBASSY DELHI REPORTS THAT IT NOW SEEMS LIKELY KASHMIRI LEADER SHEIKH ABDULLAH WILL RETURN TO POWER IN KASHMIR FEBRUARY 24. WHILE NO TEXT OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN HIM AND MRS. GANDHI HAS BEEN RELEASED, AND THERE ARE APPARENTLY SOME MINOR DETAILS LEFT TO IRON OUT, EMBASSY DELHI NOW BELIEVES AGREEMENT WILL GO THROUGH AND MRS. GANDHI WILL PROBABLY MAKE A STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT NEXT WEEK.

2. ABDULLAH SEEMS TO HAVE GOTTEN VERY LITTLE EXCEPT FOR A GOI ASSURANCE NOT TO CHANGE THE STATUS OF KASHMIR. THE
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SHEIKH WILL NOT JOIN THE CONGRESS PARTY AND MAY BE ABLE TO

USE THE URDU TITLE FOR PRIME MINISTER, BUT OTHERWISE THERE WON'T BE MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIS POSITION AND THAT OF THE OUTGOING CONGRESS PARTY CHIEF MINISTER OF KASHMIR.

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3. THE SHEIK'S RETURN MEANS THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 22 YEARS KASHMIR WILL BE GOVERNED BY THE ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY. ABDULLAH NOW PUBLICLY SAYS THAT THE STATE'S ACCESSION TO INDIA IS FINAL.

4. EMBASSY DELHI THINKS THAT CONSTITUTIONALLY, THE AGREEMENT DOES NOT APPEAR TO CHANGE KASHMIR'S STATUS, EITHER WITHIN INDIA OR INTERNALLY WITHIN THE STATE, AND THUS DOES NOT SEEM TO RUN COUNTER TO THE SPIRIT OF THE SIMLA AGREEMENT, WHICH REQUIRES BOTH SIDES NOT TO TAKE UNILATERAL ACTION TO ALTER THE SITUATION "PENDING THE FINAL SETTLEMENT". IF BHUTTO GOES THROUGH WITH HIS CALL FOR A STRIKE, DELHI BELIEVES THERE MAY BE SOME MINOR DISTURBANCES IN KASHMIR FOR A BRIEF PERIOD. IF, AS A RESULT OF THE GANDHI-ABDULLAH AGREEMENT, PAKISTAN HALTS NEGOTIATIONS FOR NORMALIZATION OF INDO-PAK RELATIONS, THE INDIANS CURRENTLY ANTICIPATE THE INTERRUPTION WILL ONLY BE TEMPORARY. INGERSOLL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL LEADERS, KASHMIR, TOSEC 252
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975STATE034231
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JNACH:JES
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750053-0681
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750240/aaaabkde.tel
Line Count: 82
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <11 AUG 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <28 NOV 2003 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KASHMIR--SHEIKH ABDULLAH RETURN TO POWER LIKELY PASS ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON
TAGS: PFOR, IN, PK, (ABDULLAH, SHEIKH)
To: JERUSALEM
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006